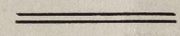


A Report
on the
Social and Moral Condition
of
Indians in Fiji.

Being the outcome of an investigation
set on foot by Combined Women's
Organisations of Australasia



Sydney :
The Kingston Press, 38-42 Oxford Street
1918

FOREWORD.

This enquiry was instituted by combined women's organizations in Australasia to ascertain how a woman with a knowledge of Indian life would view the moral conditions of the Indian community in Fiji.

In November, 1917, Rev. C. F. Andrews, M.A., came to Australia, after a visit to Fiji. He addressed meetings in the various States, and his statements as to the moral condition, especially of Indian women and children, made many women's organizations anxious to obtain independent information on the subject.

The following women's organizations in Australia and New Zealand then co-operated to form a committee to deal with the matter, and in May, 1918, Miss Garnham, of the London Missionary Society, Calcutta, went to Fiji as their representative.

Australasian:

Australian Board of Missions.
League of Honour.
National Y.W.C.A.
Students' Christian Union.

New South Wales:

National Council of Women of N.S.W. (a)
Association of Women Workers.
Baptist Women's Missionary Auxiliary.
Church of England Mothers' Union.
Church Missionary Society.
Child Study Association.
Feminist Club.
London Missionary Society Women's Auxiliary.

(a) The National Council of Women of N.S.W. has made independent representations to the Governor of Fiji in the matter.

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Methodist Women's Missionary Auxiliary.
National Association (Mosman).
Presbyterian Women's Missionary Association.
Sydney Y.W.C.A.
Women's Reform League.
Women's Christian Temperance Union.
Women's Peace Army.

Victoria:

Society to Combat the Social Evil.
The National Council of Women.

New Zealand:

W.C.T.U., Christchurch.

Queensland:

The National Council of Women.

South Australia:

W.C.T.U.
Y.W.C.A.
Girls' Friendly Society.
League of Honour.
League of Loyal Women.
Catholic Women's Federation.
Kindergarten Union.
Travellers' Aid Society.
Council of Girls' Clubs.
Liberal Women's Educational Association.
Women Graduates' Association.
Women's Non-Party Political Association.
Women's Representative League.
Adelaide Rescue Society.
Mothers' Union.
South Australian Mothers' Union.
Methodist Women's Foreign Missionary Auxiliary.
Presbyterian Mission.
Red Cross Society.

Western Australia:

The National Council of Women.
Women's Service Guild.
W.C.T.U.

Tasmania:

The National Council of Women.

Prior to the visit a letter was sent to the Colonial Secretary of Fiji, asking that Miss Garnham might be assisted as far as possible in her work. Several members of the Committee also interviewed the Sydney Manager of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (the chief employers of Indian labour in Fiji), and he kindly promised to inform the Company's managers at the various centres in Fiji and direct them to help Miss Garnham in every possible way.

(Signed)

President—WINIFRED SCOTT-FLETCHER.

Vice-Presidents—LAURA BOGUE-LUFFMANN.
ETHEL PRATT.

Hon. Secretaries—HENRIETTA S. BENNETT.
EDITH THOMPSON.

Hon. Treasurer—J. JONES.

REPORT.

I beg to report as follows on my visit to Fiji, June 4th to August 26th, 1918.

Attitude of Government Officials, Planters, Missionaries & Indians On arrival at Suva I presented my credentials at the Colonial office, and was informed by the Colonial Secretary, that His Excellency the Governor had directed that every courtesy and facility should be extended to me by all Government officials.

Throughout my whole visit, which lasted for three months, I met with the greatest courtesy and consideration from Government officials, agents of the various companies, planters, and missionaries. Through their assistance I was enabled to make much fuller enquiries than would otherwise have been possible. In Suva, His Excellency the Acting Governor, Hon. Eyre Hutson, was exceedingly kind, as also were the Hon. R. M. Booth, Agent-General for Immigration, Hon. G. W. A. Lynch, Chief Medical Officer, and Mr. G. Mackay, M.A, Superintendent of Schools, who helped by explaining points that were not clear to me, and by discussing quite freely and frankly Indian problems in Fiji.

Planters and missionaries proved most hospitable, and helpful in every way. District Commissioners, District Medical Officers, and the Assistant Inspectors of Immigrants in the various districts gave every possible assistance, often at great personal inconvenience.

The Indian people also helped considerably by taking me into their confidence, and talking in a very friendly way about their life in the colony.

To all who thus helped to make the visit successful, I should like to express my warmest appreciation and thanks.

Districts visited. My investigations were confined to Viti Levu, the main island of Fiji. Unfortunately, it was not possible in the limited time at my disposal to visit any of the other islands, but I was told that conditions prevailing on the main island were typical of those in the whole group. The districts visited were Suva, Nausori, Navua, Lautoka, Nadi, Nadroga and Ba.

INDIAN INDENTURED LABOUR.

Before proceeding further with the report on conditions in Fiji, it is necessary to state certain general facts relating to Indian indentured labour.

For the past eighty years, Indians have been allowed to emigrate to various colonies under the Indentured Labour system.

Colonies using Indentured Labour. The colonies at present using indentured labour are:—Trinidad, British Guiana, Jamaica, Fiji and the Dutch colony of Surinam (Dutch Guiana).

Common Features. The features common to indentured labour are as follows:—

1. The recruitment of Indians at the rate of forty women for every hundred men.
2. A term of five years' labour regulated by the State.
3. The absence of freedom to choose or change either employment or employer.
4. The payment of immigration charges by the employer.
5. A low standard rate of wages. (In Fiji 1/3 per day for men, 1/- per day for women.)

(See *Immigration Ordinances for 1892, and various amending ordinances.*)

Authorities responsible for regulations with regard to Indenture. All regulations controlling this form of labour were drawn up by the colony concerned, in conjunction with the Indian Government, and submitted to the Colonial Office of the Imperial Government for approval. Arrangements for recruiting and emigration were made in India itself; the various colonies made themselves responsible for the cost of importing the labour and arranged for the allotment of Indians to the various plantations and mills, recovering the cost of the introduction of such men and women from the employers.

Commissions of Enquiry. In 1913, Mr. McNeill, I.C.S., and Mr. Chimman Lal, an Indian gentleman from the United Provinces, were sent by the Government of India to all the Crown colonies employing Indian labour in order to make enquiries into the condition of indentured people. These gentlemen, from their knowledge of Indian life, and their opportunity of comparing conditions in the various colonies, were able to make certain recommendations for the improvement of the system, and for the elimina-

tion from it of certain undesirable features to which they drew attention. Unfortunately, however, it appears from their report that they concerned themselves more with the economic and material side of things, than with the inner life of the people, and so did not get at the heart of the moral problem. For instance, although in their report they show that the sex proportion is wrong, their only recommendation is that 50, instead of 40 females should be recruited with every 100 males. They did, however, deal with certain social conditions which accounted for the excessive number of violent crimes and suicides recorded in the Fiji Government reports. This caused leading Indian gentlemen to realise the necessity of going more deeply into the question of the social life of the people in Fiji, in order to discover what led to the large number of suicides and crimes. They, therefore, deputed two English gentlemen well known in Northern India as friends of the Indian people—Rev. C. F. Andrews, M.A., and Mr. W. W. Pearson, M.A., to visit Fiji in order to study the problems at first hand. The enquiry made by them was entirely unofficial and independent, though Lord Hardinge gave his sanction to the visit.

Attitude of Indian people to Indenture System. For many years the leaders of Indian public opinion have been opposed to the indentured system, since to their minds so many evil features were involved. It may appear strange that, although the Indian people were averse to the indentured labour system, it was allowed to continue for so many years. It must be remembered, however, that it is only since 1908 that Indians have been represented by their own people on the Viceroy's Legislative Council. The Indian indentured labour system was instituted long before this, and was therefore approved by a council consisting of Europeans only. It has never been approved by the Indian members of the Viceroy's Council, appointed since 1908.

The following extract from a letter written in 1915, signed by Lord Hardinge, then Viceroy of India, to the Secretary of State for India, will show how great was the opposition to the system among leading Indian people.

“... Whatever may be the extent of the economic advantage arising from the emigration of indentured labour, the political aspect of the question is such that no one, who has at heart the interests of British rule in India, can afford to neglect it. It is one of the most prominent subjects in Indian political life to-day; and its discussion arouses more bitterness, perhaps, than that of any other outstanding question. For Indian politicians, moderate and extreme alike, consider that the existence of this system, which they do not hesitate to call

by the name of slavery, brands their whole race in the eyes of the British Colonial Empire with the stigma of helotry. How, they ask, will a European colonial ever admit us into the fellowship of citizens of the Empire, when he knows that men of our country and colour can be purchased for five years for five shillings a week? It is firmly believed also in this country, and it would appear, not without grave reason, that the women emigrants are too often living a life of immorality in which their persons are, by reason of pecuniary temptation or official pressure, at the free disposal of their fellow recruits, and even of the subordinate managing staff. The feelings which these beliefs engender are strong. . . .”

(See Council's Paper No. 36, Leg. Council, Fiji, 1916.)

The report issued after the visit of Messrs. Andrews and Pearson to Fiji in 1915 made a great impression on the Indian people. On March 20th, 1916, the Viceroy announced that the indenture system would be brought to an end, as soon as possible, in every colony where it was still in force. In January, 1917, however, news reached India that the Home Government contemplated a delay of five years, during which time recruiting might still be carried on! It was then that, for the first time on record, leading women from every province in India went in a deputation to the Viceroy, and asked that the indenture system should be abolished without delay. The effect of this action on the part of the women of India was immediate. The Viceroy announced that all further recruiting for indenture should be stopped at once. This decision was soon afterwards confirmed, and thus the indentured labour system was abolished.

Indian population in various colonies 1913, and suicide rate per million in each colony. The following is a comparative table, showing the number of Indians in the various colonies in 1913, together with the average suicide rate per million for the ten years ending 1912:—

Colony.	Suicide Rate per million.			
	Indent	Unindent.	Indent.	Unindent.
Trinidad	12747	13306	406	134
British Guiana	9114	57336	100	52
Jamaica	4047	—	396	—
Fiji	15961	35644	926	147

Re-produced from Messrs. McNeill and Chimman Lal's report.

(The average suicide rate in the United Provinces, from which district in India the vast majority of immigrants are recruited, is only 63 per million.)

Now this extraordinarily high suicide rate has very close connection with the sex disproportion, as is shown by the following table:—

Colony.	Adult Males.	Adult Females.	Percentage of Females.
Trinidad	31989	17169	35
British Guiana	53083	34799	39.6
Jamaica	7137	4775	41
Fiji	20662	8785	30.4

Note.—Figures compiled from 1911 Census reports of various colonies. The proportion of females is probably higher now (1918).

A comparison of the above tables shows that the suicide rate is found to be at its worst in the colonies with the largest population basis of indentured labour, and also that Fiji, where the sex proportion is most abnormal, has also the highest suicide rate.

Reasons for special enquiry in Fiji. I have often been asked why, since other colonies are also using this form of labour, special attention has been directed to conditions in Fiji.

The above figures show that evils exist in other colonies, and it will be well to keep this in mind, but they also show that the suicide rate is greatest by far in Fiji—a significant enough fact to warrant a special enquiry: especially as an excessive number of violent crimes are also reported in the same colony. In fairness to Fiji it must also be said that various important amendments have, from time to time, within recent years been made in the immigration ordinance, perhaps the most beneficial to the Indian being the abolition in 1912 of the penal clause for labour offences, and the reduction in the daily task. But such action on the part of the Government really only provided palliatives, and could but have the effect of bolstering up an evil system. The main causes which led to the large number of suicides and crimes remained untouched.

The moral and social evils which this condition of affairs indicated, lay in the following causes:—

Causes of moral and social evils. 1. The disproportion of the sexes—the evils arising from this disproportion are intensified when a large number of men and women are forced to live in a crowded area.

2. Lack of privacy in the coolie “lines,” and the consequent impossibility of developing a pure home life.

3. (a) Break of environment:—"Indian village life is a very complex whole. The villages are generally ignorant of conditions outside their own villages, and much more so of those in foreign countries. When this communal village life is broken up by the villager being carried to a strange and distant land, and its age-long social restraints and religious sanctions are removed, then in the bulk of cases demoralisation must set in, as has actually been admitted to be the case."

(Extract from Memorandum by Indian members of Viceroy's Legislative Council, March, 1917.)

(b) Absence of leadership, following on break with old communal life.

4. Loss of self-respect arising from lack of liberty and from degradation of life in coolie lines.

Abolition of Indenture System. The system of indentured labour has now been abolished, and by November, 1921, there will be no Indians working under "indenture." It will be readily understood, however, that the evils arising from the indenture system are not likely to be eradicated for many years, and only then, if some special means are taken to accomplish reform in the social, moral, and religious life of the people.

The number of Indians at present under indenture in Fiji is about 4,700. It would be well if all of these could be released at once. There is no doubt that the effect would in the main be beneficial. It may be argued that the disorganisation of labour involved would re-act on the Indian worker, and so be detrimental to his interests, as well as to those of employers. It would mean that those who decided not to continue to serve their old employers would, finding themselves suddenly freed, find themselves homeless also, and a certain amount of overcrowding, with its attendant evils, would be the result. It may, however, be possible to remove these difficulties, and the gain in self-respect among the whole Indian population would be something well worth striving after.

The loss of self-respect involved in the indenture system has sometimes been questioned, but from the attitude of free and indentured people with whom I have spoken on the matter, there is no doubt in my mind as to the existence of this feeling. Free men and women felt insulted if they were thought to be indentured people, and the indentured people expressed their feeling of shame and humiliation at being in such a position.

THE PLANTATION LINES.

The quarters or "lines" in which Indians working on plantations live, are built according to Government Regulations. (See *Immigration Ordinances 1892, and various amending ordinances.*)

Kitchens

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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Apartments—A double row under one roof.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16

Kitchens

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
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The Regulations provide that:—

Size. Each apartment shall be deemed a suitable dwelling which provides the proportion of not less than one hundred and twenty feet of superficial space (*Note.*—10ft. x 12ft.) for three single men, or one man and one woman with not more than two children.

Material. The material used must be wood, or other permanent building material.

The **walls** must be close fitting and weather tight, and must be whitewashed internally at least once a year. The **inner** partition walls dividing one apartment from another must be built as high as the outer walls (*i.e., to a height of about ten feet*) and continued to the sloping roof by battens two inches apart, or by strong wire netting.

The roofs are of tiles or galvanised iron, and the floor of wood or earth raised not less than six inches above the surrounding area.

The doors must be provided with an outside fastening. (*There are no windows.*)

Kitchens. Small kitchens of galvanised iron are built opposite the lines, one to each apartment.

Line nurseries. The employer is required to provide where necessary a room in the lines for the separate accommodation of infants and young children of indentured immigrants during the absence of their parents in working hours, and to provide also a nurse to have charge of each such nursery.

Sanitary system and Water Supply. A proper sanitary system must be provided on each estate. In view of the fact that ankylostomiasis (hookworm disease) is prevalent, especially on the south side of the main island, this is very important.

A good and sufficient water supply is insisted upon, on all estates.

Inspection of lines. All buildings on estates are inspected at regular intervals by the District Medical Officer and the District Inspector of Immigrants.

Evils of Lines. My own feeling about the lines is that they are entirely unsuitable for married people.

There can be no real home life where it is impossible to ensure privacy, and anything approaching privacy is quite impossible in the lines.

When it is remembered that there are roughly three times as many men as women living in the lines, the danger of this method of housing will be more fully realised. It is true that some planters arrange for single men to live in a row of lines separate from the married people, or at one end of a row of dwellings while the married folk live at the other, though even this is not always insisted upon, and the married quarters are by no means barred to men. I had evidence from various sources during my stay on the island that life in the lines is unspeakably corrupt.

Indians speak of the lines at the mill-centres as "prostitution houses," and many men whose period of indenture had expired told me how glad they were to be away from the lines, and to settle in places where their wives were protected. It was quite impossible, they said, for a woman to preserve her chastity in the coolie lines.

Childhood contaminated. This utter abandonment of morals is unfortunately not confined to the adult section of the community. I have heard little children speak of things which showed an appalling knowledge of vice of the worst kind. Children over three years of age, whose mothers are working on plantations are quite uncared for as a rule, while the parents are at work. This neglect of childhood is one of the gravest features of life in the lines. It is scarcely to be wondered, in the circumstances, that Australian women in charge of the Methodist Mission Orphanage find that tiny children brought to them show a knowledge of evil that is exceedingly difficult to counteract.

Unindentured people living in lines. Unfortunately it is not only indentured people who live in the lines. On some estates I found more free than indentured people occupying these quarters—not because they are content or satisfied with the lines, though certain advantages are provided, e.g.—free quarters, a good water supply, and satisfactory sanitary arrangements; but because as a rule the only alternative would be for a man to lease a piece of land as near the estate as possible, and either build a house for himself, or pay a Fijian to build it for him. I found also that some men were willing to stay in the lines in order to be near women who were the wives of other men. Sometimes I even found that husbands consented, for certain monetary considerations, to allow their wives to be shared by other men for a certain period. The degradation and unhappiness of such a life may be better imagined than described.

One may well pause to consider what sort of childhood is possible where the motherhood is so utterly depraved.

The majority of the planters with whom I discussed the housing question, agreed that the present system is most unsatisfactory, and some have erected reed huts on their estates for some of their employees. The main difficulty seems to lie in the fact that the buildings are in most cases the property of the sugar company, and are only rented as part of the estate by the planter; so that the planter does not feel responsible, but considers it the duty of the company to erect suitable houses.

Improvements initiated. The Colonial Sugar Refining Company have two schemes on foot for housing the people directly employed by them at their mill centres. At Ba, separate wooden houses, each consisting of

a living room, with a verandah back and front, and a kitchen, are being erected for married men employed in the mill; and at Lautoka, quarter-acre plots have been let to Indian employees at a nominal rental, and on these plots they erect their own reed huts. I visited some of these homes, and found the people on the whole happy and contented. Many expressed their satisfaction with the new arrangements, and said how glad they were to be right away from the sordidness of the coolie lines.

The Colonial Sugar Refining Company has also instituted a scheme for the settlement on ready made farms of Indians serving the last year under indenture, and for their occupation when their indentures have expired. The Company has set apart large areas for this purpose, and men in their fourth or fifth year take up these holdings. While they remain under indenture, they continue to live in the lines and are subject to the immigration laws; but they soon free themselves and their wives, settle on the outskirts of the plantation, and devote their energies to the hand-cultivation of their plots.

CONDITION OF PEOPLE IN FREE SETTLEMENTS.

When the period of indenture is finished, and Indians become "free," they are encouraged to settle on the land. They are not entitled to a free passage to India until they have lived ten years in the colony, and so there is no alternative but to find some employment during the five years after indenture. Some are retained on the plantations, but the majority rent or lease land on which they settle with their families. Numbers of men and women living on the free settlements expressed to me their relief at being right away from the surroundings of the "lines," with all the evil associations of the five years under indenture.

Land Settlement schemes. For several years a Government Land Settlement scheme for Indians has been in operation—the Government acquiring land from registered proprietors and from native owners, and leasing it to Indians whose period of indenture has expired. Recently the Colonial Sugar Refining Company has offered to lend sums up to £100,000 at 4 per cent. to the Government in order to extend this Indian land settlement scheme.

By far the greatest number of free Indians are employed in agriculture. In some districts rice is grown fairly extensively, and in others maize, lentils, and tobacco. A large num-

ber of Indians grow sugar cane, either on their own land, or on land leased from the various sugar companies.

Many of these free Indians are very prosperous. I found a far greater degree of general prosperity on the northern and western sides of the island than on the south, where the climate is not so good, and the Indian people on the whole are poor.

Immorality extends beyond the lines. It will be easily understood that immorality is not left behind in the "lines," but extends also to the unindentured people. Polyandry is not uncommon, and trafficking in young girls is appallingly frequent. There is no

doubt that the unnatural sex ratio lies at the root of much of the evil. Under normal circumstances it is likely that this condition will be changed by natural processes within thirty years or so, but in the meantime there is danger of the moral evil becoming so acute that it may persist long after the proportion has become equalised.

Need for remedy. It therefore seems absolutely necessary that some action should be taken to remedy the evil by other means. The sooner the equalising process takes place, the better for all concerned, and so I would urge that every possible step be taken to further this end. It would be criminal to leave things to right themselves if some means could be found to expedite the process. This can be accomplished either by encouraging single men to leave the colony, or by the introduction of more women.

Suggestions for remedy. It has been suggested that Indian widows might be encouraged to go to Fiji to re-marry. I do not think the suggestion a practical one. Popular opinion in India is absolutely opposed to widow re-marriage, and the sentiment is strongest among illiterate people. It is extremely unlikely that they would be at all willing to allow the widows in their communities to go to Fiji for such a purpose; and the widows would probably consider they were degrading themselves by marrying again, and so at the very outset their own self-respect would be lost.

The introduction of shiploads of women to other colonies has rarely proved satisfactory.

It should be possible to arrange for single men to go to India to find wives, and for parents to return to find wives for their sons. There are obstacles even to this plan. It is possible that respectable people in India will not be anxious to allow their daughters to marry men from Fiji, for in most cases these men have lost caste, and, apart from this, stories of Indian life in Fiji are current in Indian villages—stories that would make parents hesitate to allow their children to become members of the Indian population in Fiji. However, it would be worth while trying to discover in India itself how far these difficulties could be overcome.

Expense involved. The main difficulty to this plan from the Fijian Government's point of view is that of expense.

It is calculated that free passages for five thousand men to India, together with return passages for the same men with their wives would cost about a quarter of a million pounds. But the evils arising from the disproportion of the sexes are so great, and the danger to the colony so serious, that any cost involved in finding a remedy would be warranted.

It is important to note that under the indenture system, labour units, not families, were recruited. In some cases married couples were introduced, but only because both were labour units. Thus only women who were willing to work in the fields were recruited. To bring out married couples simply because they were married was not in the scheme at all; it would have meant greater expenditure in introducing the people into the colony—and so apparently the cheaper method was followed. It is just here that the greatest mistake was made, for clearly the introduction of families would have obviated much of the evil in Fiji to-day. Moral interests were evidently sacrificed to money, and the fact that the prosperity of a colony depends largely on the moral and social welfare of the people seems to have been disregarded.

I was told in Fiji that the colony could never meet the expenditure involved in thus bringing out more women, and was asked how the financial outlay could be met. Since the sugar companies and planters have benefited from the immigration of Indians on a cheap scale, it appears just that they should pay at least a part of the cost, but it is difficult to see how it could be recovered from them. Those responsible for the introduction of the system should also take their share, and it may be possible to work out a scheme by which the Imperial and Indian Governments could assist financially.

General hopelessness of Indian outlook.

One fact that needs to be emphasised in order to give a true picture of the hopelessness of the present condition of the people, is that a very high percentage of men and women have left wives or husbands and children in India.

As everyone knows, most Indian people are married while quite young, and there are practically no bachelors or spinsters in the country except in Christian and "reformed" Hindu communities.

I found that very few women had come out with their husbands. They had been induced by various means to leave their homes—and men had for the most part come without their wives. A big tragedy lies behind this fact.

Some men and women, although already married, form other alliances soon after arrival in Fiji. This is one of the reasons why many men cannot return to their own country. It would mean in most cases that they would be forced to desert wives and children in Fiji in order to return.

Ignorance of conditions in Fiji, on part of Indian Immigrants.

It is very evident that a great deal of fraud and deception was practised by recruiters in inducing Indian men and women to leave their homes in this way. The people themselves told me how they had been persuaded to come away, and how little they knew of the distance of Fiji from India, and of the conditions obtaining in the colony. How should they, who only know their own little district, be expected to understand how far they would be taken from their own homes, of the impossibility of return, of the complete change in the mode of life entailed, of the increased cost of living, which would swallow up all the extra wages they thought they would be able to earn? Many expressed to me their feeling of utter hopelessness. They said that their honour had been snatched from them, and that since that had gone, nothing else mattered.

Ignorance of Europeans of Indian life & custom.

European people seemed to be under the impression that the Indian immigrant had but brought an immoral mode of life with him into the colony. As a matter of fact, the home life of the village people in the United Provinces, the district from which most of the Indian people were recruited, is so safeguarded as to warrant the statement that they are more free from social evils than any other people in the world.

Morality safeguarded by a sheltered life fails completely when a people so nurtured are removed from their environment, and social restraints have been taken away. In their new environment such a people lose their innocence, and with it their self-respect. This has proved to be the case in Fiji.

Indian Marriage. To the Indian, marriage has little civil significance. Its religious significance is everything. In India itself early-marriage is the rule, and caste rule and other social factors are considered in regulating it. For this reason, all marriages according to Indian custom are considered legally valid.

In Fiji, however, at present, Indian custom marriages are not valid in the eyes of the law. A civil declaration is considered necessary, and the religious significance of marriage is ignored by the Government. The result has been that the majority of the marriages have not been performed according to Government regulations, and the law does not uphold such irregular marriages. This has led to a loosening of the marriage tie, with attendant evils. One of the greatest evils at present is the trafficking in young girls. Parents will sell a daughter to one man, and then, finding that another man is willing to pay more, take her from the first, on the ground that no civil declaration has been made, and give her to the second. I had several instances of this brought to my notice during my stay in Fiji. Public opinion is such a strong force in India as to prevent such a thing taking place there.

A new marriage Ordinance has been prepared, but as it stands at present it seems scarcely to meet the need with regard to Indians. Unfortunately, very few Government officials have an intimate knowledge of Indian life and custom, which knowledge is essential in compiling such an ordinance. Owing to the special needs and conditions obtaining in Fiji, an ordinance of this kind can only be drawn up by those having a knowledge both of India and Fiji. In the new ordinance, provision is made for the registration of Indian marriage officers and priests, but since no penalty is imposed upon unregistered men who perform marriage ceremonies, the old evils are likely to continue. Yet to impose a penalty would be to interfere with the religious beliefs of the people. Some means should be found of making all Indian custom marriages valid.

Lack of Leadership. One of the great needs of the Indian community in Fiji to-day is that of leadership. **The indenture system destroyed communal life and left social chaos.** It ignored the fact that the Indian people live

under an exceedingly complex social system, and it broke down an age-long organization and gave nothing in its place. It may be argued that this big defect will be remedied in course of time, but at present the colony is sadly lacking in Indian men competent to lead. All the influences of a sane, healthy public opinion are missing; but public opinion depends largely upon leaders. These may be obtained in two ways—by a suitable system of education, and by the introduction of good men as teachers, doctors, etc., from India, who would command the respect of their fellow-countrymen in Fiji. I am certain that the building up of a definite social system will do much to purify social life.

Some of the District Commissioners in Fiji are doing everything in their power to help in the development of communal life. In one district the magistrate told me he sometimes referred matters brought to him for settlement back to a small "panchayat," or Indian District Council, especially in cases of marriage or land disputes. Sometimes the result was satisfactory, but there was danger at the present stage in the fact that there are only very few men able to assert authority, and there was a big temptation to these few to control affairs for their own ends.

The District Commissioners in Fiji on the whole are doing admirable work, seeking to understand the Indian people as well as the Fijians. It was satisfactory to find that some of the magistrates had learnt Hindustani and could conduct cases in the police courts almost without the aid of an interpreter. In view of the fact that the large majority of court cases are Indian, it would be well if all magistrates in Indian centres were expected to acquire a knowledge of at least one Indian language. At present some of the magistrates know little Hindustani and less of Indian life. Under such circumstances the administration of justice must be exceedingly difficult, if not at times impossible. It would be a great advantage if officials who have to deal with Indian problems in the colony could be given an opportunity of going to India in order to study conditions there.

THE LABOUR QUESTION.

Planters in Fiji are greatly concerned at the shortage of labour, and many consider that the abolition of the indenture system spells ruin to the European planter.

In order to understand the present position, it is necessary to give certain data.

Population of Fiji. The present population of Fiji consists of, roughly, 88,000 Fijians, 61,000 Indians, and 10,000 Europeans and others.

Fijians, as a rule, do not work on plantations for various reasons which it is not necessary to state here.

Indian occupations. The Indian population consists mainly of people who were brought out under the indenture system. The term of indenture was five years, and after that time the Indian was free to go where he pleased. At the end of another five years he was entitled to a free passage to India. The majority did not return, but made a permanent home in Fiji. With fresh supplies of cheap labour constantly available, neither the sugar companies nor the planters were anxious to retain the services of men whose period of service had expired, except in special cases. The Indians were equally anxious to leave the plantations as a rule, and to settle on land of their own. Some took up areas suitable for the cultivation of sugar cane, but the majority settled away from the cane-areas, in districts where they could grow marketable produce, such as rice, maize, lentils and tobacco, and keep cows and goats. This is a mode of life to which Indians are accustomed in their own country, and one that is much more congenial to them than plantation life. It must also be realised that, apart from the fact that the Indian finds himself in his natural element on his own little estate, there is an added advantage in the fact that he can earn a better living with far less effort on his own land than by working on a plantation, where he is compelled to complete a certain task every day, in wet or fine weather, for a very low wage.

The present labour situation. With the abolition of indentured labour a new situation has arisen. Instead of 18,000 indentured Indians, there are less than 5,000, and by November 1921 at the very latest all workers will be free. The planters are therefore faced with a shortage of labour. At present the problem is being partly met by a system of twelve-monthly agreements, the labourer agreeing to work for the term of one year under the same conditions as indentured men and for the same wage, with the addition of a bonus, usually of £7/10/-.

It is extremely unlikely, however, that the problem will be entirely solved in this way. It is at present only used as a means of supplementing indentured labour, and even with this form of labour the supply is not nearly equal to the demand.

I found that on some plantations the labour shortage was not nearly so great as on others. It is likely that the problem will be more acute on the south side of the island than on the north and west since many free Indians are moving away from the south to the drier and more prosperous districts on the other side of the island.

Certain European planters have a reputation among the Indian people for justice and kindness in their treatment of employees. It is significant that these planters are at present getting as many labourers as they need, while others are having to give up a great part of their land on account of the shortage of labour.

It must not be thought that the question is merely one of wages, though it is certain that a better wage would attract a large number of Indians to the plantations. The Indian agricultural labourer in Fiji is happiest when he can live under conditions approximating as nearly as possible to those obtaining in India itself. This fact may prove a clue to the solution of the labour problem. Planters will probably find that it will pay them in the end to give up part of their land at present under cane and give employees allotments of land, on which separate houses can be built and where cows may be kept and plots of land cultivated.

Proposed introduction of other races. From various sources proposals have come that Chinese or Japanese Labour should be imported. It is very greatly to be hoped that such a step will not be taken. The present moral evils in Fiji are acute enough. We may imagine the pandemonium that would be likely to follow the introduction of people of another nationality. **Moral interests should precede commercial interests.** This point cannot be emphasised too strongly.

HOSPITALS.

Public Hospital. The General Hospital in Suva is the only public hospital in the colony to which Indians are admitted.

Plantation Hospitals. There are, however, plantation hospitals in which indentured and free plantation employees are treated. Other Indians are also admitted on payment of 2/- per day, or without charge if destitute.

Staff. These hospitals are subject to the regulations contained in the Indian Immigration Ordinance, with regard to buildings, equipment and staff. The district medical officer visits the hospital usually three times a week.

A hospital superintendent is placed in charge of each plantation hospital. These men are not qualified doctors, but have had some experience of medical work. There are also in each hospital an Indian sirdar, or male-attendant, and an Indian "dai" or nurse. These women are without training, though some become competent through experience. There are no trained women at all in charge of women's wards.¹

Buildings and Equipment. The dispensaries and operating rooms are well fitted and equipped. The best drugs and medicines are used. The wards are large, airy, and clean, and are surrounded by wide verandahs. The wards are practically destitute of furniture except for a few beds. The patients, I am told, prefer to sleep on the floor, and they usually spend their days on the verandahs. These are enclosed by wooden battens, three or four inches apart, this being considered necessary in order to prevent patients leaving the wards at night.

Main diseases. The main diseases being treated were:—Sores and wounds, skin diseases, bronchitis, tuberculosis, ankylostomiasis (hookworm), dysentery, and venereal disease. There were also some maternity cases, though I noticed that the number of these was very small.

Since the number of indentured Indians has been reduced, the hospitals have become almost empty. In one hospital, built to accommodate 120 patients, there were only 20, including men, women, and children. "Free" people do not as a rule avail themselves of the benefits of the hospitals; and women have a strong objection to being treated in them.

Impression of the hospitals. My impression of the hospitals was that very good work was being done both by the district medical officers and by the hospital superintendents; but that the buildings were bare and cheerless, and that no real nursing was attempted. It was very evident that no competent women had taken part in the planning or the staffing of the hospitals. The lack of little comforts and refinements that mean so much to sick people was most noticeable.

¹ Note.—A trained nurse has recently been appointed to the plantation hospital at Penang, owned by the Melbourne Trust.

Prejudice against present hospital system. I went into the question of the prejudice of free people against the hospitals, and was told by the doctors and hospital superintendents that the reasons for this

were the objection of free people to being treated with indentured, the general belief that a hospital is a place to die in, the dislike of restraint and of being separated from home and friends in time of sickness, and their fear of being treated by a foreigner, and by methods that were strange to them. The Indian people themselves gave these and other reasons. They object to their women being treated by men, and especially by men other than qualified doctors; and they also feel that 2/- a day is too large a sum for them to pay while in hospital.

Hospitals in India. In India the main objections and prejudices have been largely met on the women's side by the institution of women's hospitals, staffed entirely by European and Indian women. The splendid medical work accomplished by "Dufferin" doctors and nurses, and by women's medical missions in India, should indicate the best method of approaching the medical problems in Fiji. It is true that there are difficulties, but these do not appear to be greater than those experienced in India itself when Lady Dufferin instituted her Association in 1880.

Need of women for hospital work. Doubt was expressed by some Europeans as to the possibility of getting suitable women to take up such work. I was informed that several nurses in the Suva Hospital had resigned, and that the reason seemed to be that they disliked the work in Fijian and Indian wards, though that was not the reason given by the nurses themselves. Several hospital superintendents expressed the opinion that the work was too repulsive to ask European women to do, and they also felt that the life would be very lonely for women in isolated districts. There certainly would be no attractions for the ordinary medical woman, and the only women likely to undertake such work would be those who did it from humanitarian and missionary motives. Indeed, they are the only women who would be of any use in the colony. I cannot believe that no such women are available in Australia, as has been suggested. Would it be possible to form a strong association whose object is, in the words of Lady Dufferin, "to bring medical knowledge and medical relief to the women of (Fiji) an association which should carefully avoid compromising the simplicity of its aim by keeping clear of all controversial subjects and by working in a strictly unsectarian spirit command the support and sympathy of everyone in the country who has women dependent upon him."

It has been suggested that Indian medical women might be available for work in Fiji. Unfortunately there are all too few women qualified for such work to meet the need in India itself, and I do not think the prospect of finding such women a very hopeful one.

As well as the work of rendering medical aid to Indian women, and of the exercise of a healthy moral influence upon those patients who come under her care, an equally important function of the medical woman would be the training of Indian women in the service of their fellow country women. At present no Indian men or women in Fiji are being trained in medical work. Unfortunately very few boys, and fewer girls, have received even an elementary education, such as would be necessary before entering on a course of training in nursing or dispensing. I met some, however, whose parents said they would be quite willing for their daughters to be trained as nurses, provided that suitable supervision and hostel accommodation could be guaranteed. This they considered most important, and can be well understood by those who realise the special temptations in Fiji.

Two of the Methodist Mission sisters are trained nurses, and are doing most valuable district work, and, in addition, actually manage to run boarding schools! It would be well if these women, who have won the respect and confidence of both Fijians and Indians, could be entirely set apart for district nursing work.

Future of hospitals. By 1921 all men and women at present under indenture will be free, and plantation owners will presumably be no longer required to provide hospitals, since this was only required by the Immigration Ordinances. It has not yet been decided what the Government policy with regard to hospitals will be.

The present hospital system is very unpopular, and now, when a new order of things is coming into being, seems to be the time to re-organise and plan for the future. In India and elsewhere a Government hospital scheme, supplemented by missionary and other voluntary agencies, has proved most satisfactory, and in Fiji the same may be found true. Hospitals run in accordance with such a scheme would provide medical aid for the whole community, not merely for a small section.

EDUCATION.

A report on the social condition of Indians in Fiji would be incomplete without reference to education.

Neglect of Indian education prior to 1916. Until 1916 the Government of Fiji seems to a large extent to have overlooked the necessity of education for Indians and Fijians in the Colony. In 1914 there were only one Government and two aided public schools, with an average attendance of 365. The total expenditure on education in that year was £3,312. No part of this amount was spent on Indian education.

Work of Missionary Societies. Practically the whole burden of the education of Fijians was taken up by the Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia and the Roman Catholic Mission. Almost all Fijian children attend school, and are able at least to read and write.

Within recent years both missionary societies have also extended their educational efforts to the Indian people. The Roman Catholic Mission has an Indian school in Suva, with about 130 pupils, and the Methodist Mission has about a dozen schools with about 600 pupils. Apart from these, there are a number of small schools, managed by the Indian people themselves.

Board of Education formed 1916 In 1916 an Education Ordinance was passed in the Fiji Legislative Council, and a Board of Education was formed, with powers "to establish, regulate, and control Government schools and to grant aid from public funds to schools under denominational or private management."

Present problems. The delay in recognising Government responsibility for educating the people has resulted in big problems, which cannot be solved in a day. The problems relating to Indian education are much more acute than those relating to European and Fijian.

Perhaps the main difficulty is that of finding suitable teachers. Practically the only educated members of the community are at present employed in Government offices, etc. The masses of the people are illiterate—(last year, 1917, only 1.5 per cent. of the Indian population attended school)—and

it will therefore take several years to prepare suitable men as teachers. The Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia assists by appointing educational workers from Australia to schools under its control, and also by a teachers' training school. These missionaries are doing noble work, but their numbers are quite inadequate to meet the need.

Proposed Govt. School for Indians. Arrangements are being made for a large Government School for Indian boys near Lautoka. The Fiji Board of Education is attempting to get teachers for this school from India itself. The idea is a good one, but very much will depend on the type of man sent out.

Separate scheme needed for Indians. A suitable education scheme for Indians has not yet been worked out in Fiji. The same syllabus of instruction is issued for Fijian and Indian schools—as though it must be taken for granted that two races, entirely different in almost every way, need exactly the same type of education. However, experience will show the special needs and capacity of each people. There is scope as well as urgency for a great deal of experimental work in this direction.

Need of studying Indian languages and ideals. Educational workers should be given the opportunity of studying Indian life and ideals, as well as Indian languages. This is very important, and is in danger of being overlooked. Only those who understand the life and needs of a people are capable of preparing the children to take their place in life as members of their own community. There is always a danger of foreign teachers exercising a denationalising influence—and this can be best met by making every effort to get in sympathetic touch with the thought and custom of the people concerned. It would be well if all European educationalists, before taking up work among Indians in Fiji, could first spend at least a year in India itself. The reasons for this are obvious. Indian life in Fiji has become corrupt and degraded. Indian ideals, customs and languages can best be studied in India.

Medium of instruction It was somewhat strange to find Indian children being taught almost entirely in English, because although in their own homes no English is used, the teacher knew very little Hindustani. In some cases the teachers had acquired some knowledge of Hindustani or another Indian language, but in the main the medium of instruction is English.

The language problem is not easy to solve, for in each district several languages are spoken, including Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kanarese. When it is urged that all elementary education should be through the medium of the vernacular, the question arises—which vernacular? It is usually found that the people from Southern India acquire a knowledge of the northern languages, and so in most of the schools it may be practicable to make Hindi or Urdu the medium of instruction.

In a few districts, however, where Tamil and Telugu-speaking people have settled in fairly large numbers, it would perhaps be possible to teach through the medium of the vernacular predominant in those districts.

Girls' education. Very few Indian girls are attending school, mainly, perhaps, because the people do not consider it necessary for girls to be educated; but also because there are no separate schools for girls, and parents object to sending their daughters to be taught with boys. For this and other reasons separate schools should be provided for girls.

Another difficulty lies in the fact that the Indian people live in very scattered districts. It will be much more expensive to organize education in the many small schools required scattered over a large area than to work out a system which would be suitable for a few large schools in more thickly populated districts. However, since the future prosperity of the colony depends to a very large extent on a right training of the children, it behoves the Government to do everything possible to encourage and provide facilities for education in every district.

The Superintendent of Schools (European, Fijian and Indian) realises that a suitable system of education for Indians can only be worked out by educationalists who are prepared to study the special needs of the Indian people, and therefore, although the present syllabus of education is somewhat rigid and stereotyped, and unlikely to commend itself to modern educationalists, freedom and scope would be given to those who are anxious to work out a suitable scheme in their own schools.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS.

1. **All indentures should be cancelled at as early a date as possible.**

It is more than possible that employers and employed alike will find the last year or so of indenture exceedingly irksome. To the employer it will mean adhering to certain rules in compliance with Government regulations for the sake of a few remaining men under indenture, and to the Indians concerned it is certain to prove especially trying, since they will feel the indignity of their position much more keenly when the majority of their fellow employees are free.

The best possible course would be for the employers themselves to take the initiative and to inform their men that at the end of a certain time—say September, 1919—all men will be released from the terms of indenture. This would favorably impress the Indian people, and would probably result in assuring their goodwill. Such a step could only be taken if the Government were willing to cooperate by cancelling all immigration charges during the last two years—that is, for all men prematurely released from the terms of indenture.

Apart from this reason, there is the far greater one—that it would tend to raise the moral tone by raising the people in their own self-esteem.

2. **Every possible means should be taken to bring about a normal sex ratio.** The evils arising from the unnatural sex proportion are by far the greatest to be contended with. The worst possible feature is the way in which quite young girls are literally sold to the highest bidder. All sense of decency and chastity is lost where such conditions obtain.
3. **The coolie lines are entirely unsuitable for married people.** Separate houses should be built for them.

It has been shown that privacy is impossible in the lines and that no proper home life is possible.

4. **Women doctors and certificated nurses should be appointed to all hospitals and dispensaries where women are treated.**

5. The hope for the future well-being of the colony lies in the children. Every possible means should be taken to counteract the demoralising influences of Indian life in the colony. **A suitable scheme of education** will do much to accomplish this.

6. **The new marriage ordinances should be revised so as to make all Indian custom marriages legally valid.** (This should not preclude the necessity of registration.)

FLORENCE E. GARNHAM.

“With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive to finish the work we have begun.” (Lincoln.)